SŪRAH 77

Al-Mursalāt

(Sent Forth)

Prologue

This *sūrah* bears sharp features, powerful images and strong notes. Indeed, it sounds like a spitting fire. It puts hearts to trial, presenting questions and threats that pierce like sharp arrows. We see a host of images from both this life and the life to come, the universe and the human soul, as well as scenes of the suffering that unbelievers will endure. After each main scene, the *sūrah* levels a fire-like strike at those hearts who deny the truth, saying: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" This comment is repeated ten times in this *sūrah* alone, as it is the final note deployed in each of its sections. It is an especially apt comment, given its sharp features and strong beat. In this respect, it reminds us of *Sūrah* 55, The Lord of Grace, where the same verse is repeated after the mention of every aspect of blessing: "*Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*" Likewise, in *Sūrah* 54, The Moon, the same comment is used after every image of punishment is drawn: "*How grievous was My punishment and how true were My warnings.*" The verse repeated in this *sūrah*, as in other *sūrahs*, serves to give its distinctively sharp tone.

The *sūrah* is composed of sections with short, quick verses. It changes its rhyme with each section, although some rhyming sounds are picked up again after they have been changed. All these sections, rhymes and

short verses are sharply felt, one after the other. One hardly recovers after one sharp note when a new one begins. Right from the outset, the general atmosphere is tempestuous, starting with a scene of strong winds, or angels: "*By those sent forth in swift succession; and those tempestuously storming on; and those scattering far and wide; and those separating [right and wrong] with all clarity; and those giving a reminder, with an excuse and a warning.*" (Verses 1–6) This opening is perfectly consistent with the ambience of the *sūrah*.

The Qur'ān is extraordinary in the way in which it uses particular frameworks to enhance the atmosphere of certain *sūrahs*. In *Sūrah* 93, The Morning Hours, which speaks about God's care and kindness, the framework is drawn from the bright morning hours and still nights. In *Sūrah* 100, The Coursers, which depicts the scattering of grave contents and the gathering of what is in people's breasts, we have a framework drawn from snorting horses striking sparks of fire. Further examples could be given in plenty.

Each of the ten sections that follow the opening of the *sūrah* represents a special round or a journey into a different world. This gives the *sūrah* great scope for reflection, feeling, ideas and responses. This scope is also much wider than the words and sentences imply.

The first round paints scenes from the day of distinction, showing the great upheaval that will take place in the universe. This is the appointment defined by God's messengers to mankind: "*When the stars are dimmed, and the sky is rent asunder, and the mountains are scattered like dust, and the messengers are given their appointed time... For what day has all this been set? For the day of distinction. Would that you knew what the day of distinction is! Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 8–15)

The second round refers to the fates suffered by communities of olden times, highlighting the divine law that applies to those who deny the divine message: "*Did We not destroy those people of old? We shall certainly cause later ones to follow them. Thus do We deal with the guilty. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 16–19)

Round three takes us to the origins of man and the impression they give of God's overall planning: "*Have We not created you from a humble fluid, placing it in a safe lodging for a pre-determined term? Thus have We*

determined; excellent indeed is how We determine. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth." (Verses 20–24)

In the fourth round we see how the earth, which takes its children, living or dead, to its bosom, has been equipped with the facility of stable life and with water that is necessary for life: "*Have We not made the earth an abode for the living and the dead? We have placed on it firm, lofty mountains and provided you with fresh water to drink. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 25–28)

The fifth round speaks of those who reject the divine message and how they are received with strong rebuke, as well as their impending punishment, on the day of distinction: "*Go to that which you used to deny! Go to a shadow rising in three columns; giving no shade, nor relief from the flame. It throws up sparks as huge as forts, as bright as yellow camels. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 29–34)

The next two rounds continue with the unbelievers, adding further rebuke: "*On that day they will not utter a word, and they will not be allowed to offer any excuse. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. This is the day of distinction: We have gathered you with all those people of old. If you have a scheme left, then use it against Me now. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 35–40)

Round eight speaks of the God-fearing and the blessings prepared for them: "*The God-fearing shall dwell amid cool shades and springs, and fruits as they may desire. Eat and drink to your hearts' content in return for what you did. Thus do We reward those who do good. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 41–45)

The last two rounds provide quick glimpses of the people who are bent on denying God's message. The first reproaches them and the second shows them in obstinate rejection: "*Eat and enjoy your life for a little while, for you are certainly guilty. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. When they are told to bow down before God, they do not bow down. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verses 46–49)

These rounds, their images and sharp notes conclude with a single verse asking: "*In what message, after this, will they believe?*" (Verse 50)

The listener follows the quick rhythm of the *sūrah* feeling almost out of breath at its succession of images. The subject matter of the *sūrah* is covered in several other *sūrahs*, particularly Makkan ones. However, the

Qur'ān tackles the truth it presents from different angles, in different lights, and with different emphases according to the situations they face. Such approaches address hearts and souls as best suits them, according to their conditions known to the One who has revealed the Qur'ān to His Messenger. They thus appear new with every new situation, because they produce new responses.

We see that this *sūrah* draws new images of hell, and takes a new approach in showing these images to unbelievers; in other words, it employs a new style of address. Thus, the *sūrah* acquires a distinctive character with intense features, sharp images and a rapid rhythm.

Al-Mursalāt (Sent Forth)

سُورَةُ المُرْسَلَاتِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By those sent forth in swift succession; (1)

وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ عُرْفًا ﴿١﴾

and those tempestuously storming on; (2)

فَالْعَاصِفَاتِ عَصْفًا ﴿٢﴾

and those scattering far and wide; (3)

وَالنَّاشِرَاتِ نَشْرًا ﴿٣﴾

and those separating [right and wrong] with all clarity; (4)

فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرْقًا ﴿٤﴾

and those giving a reminder, (5)

فَالْمُلْقِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا ﴿٥﴾

with an excuse and a warning, (6)

عُذْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا ﴿٦﴾

what you have been promised shall be fulfilled. (7)

إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ ﴿٧﴾

When the stars are dimmed, (8)

فَإِذَا النُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ ﴿٨﴾

and the sky is rent asunder, (9)

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ فُرِجَتْ ﴿٩﴾

and the mountains are scattered like dust, (10)

وَإِذَا ٱلْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ ﴿١٠﴾

and the messengers are given their appointed time... (11)

وَإِذَا ٱلرُّسُلُ أُقِّتَتْ ﴿١١﴾

For what day has all this been set? (12)

لِأَيِّ يَوْمٍ أُجِّلَتْ ﴿١٢﴾

For the day of distinction. (13)

لِيَوْمِ ٱلْفَصْلِ ﴿١٣﴾

Would that you knew what the day of distinction is! (14)

وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا يَوْمُ ٱلْفَصْلِ ﴿١٤﴾

Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (15)

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

Did We not destroy those people of old? (16)

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

We shall certainly cause later ones to follow them. (17)

ثُمَّ نُتْبِعُهُمُ ٱلْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

Thus do We deal with the guilty. (18)

كَذَٰلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (19)

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

Have We not created you from a humble fluid, (20)

أَلَمْ نَخْلُقكُّم مِّن مَّآءٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

placing it in a safe lodging (21)

فَجَعَلْنَٰهُ فِى قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ﴿٢١﴾

for a pre-determined term? (22)

إِلَىٰ قَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

Thus have We determined; excellent indeed is how We determine. (23)

فَقَدَرْنَا فَنِعْمَ ٱلْقَٰدِرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (24)

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Have We not made the earth an abode (25)

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ ٱلْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا ﴿٢٥﴾

for the living and the dead? (26)

أَحْيَآءً وَأَمْوَٰتًا ﴿٢٦﴾

We have placed on it firm, lofty mountains and provided you with fresh water to drink. (27)

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَٰسِىَ شَمِخَٰتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَٰكُم مَّآءً فُرَاتًا ﴿٢٧﴾

Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (28)

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Go to that which you used to deny! (29)

ٱنطَلِقُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ مَا كُنتُم بِهِۦ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Go to a shadow rising in three columns; (30)

ٱنطَلِقُوٓا۟ إِلَىٰ ظِلٍّ ذِى ثَلَٰثِ شُعَبٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

giving no shade, nor relief from the flame. (31)

لَّا ظَلِيلٍ وَلَا يُغْنِى مِنَ ٱللَّهَبِ ﴿٣١﴾

It throws up sparks as huge as forts, (32)	إِنَّهَا تَرْمِي بِشَرَرٍ كَالْقَصْرِ ﴿٣٢﴾
as bright as yellow camels. (33)	كَأَنَّهُ جِمَالَتٌ صُفْرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾
Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (34)	وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾
On that day they will not utter a word, (35)	هَٰذَا يَوْمُ لَا يَنطِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾
and they will not be allowed to offer any excuse. (36)	وَلَا يُؤْذَنُ لَهُمْ فَيَعْتَذِرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾
Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (37)	وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾
This is the day of distinction: We have gathered you with all those people of old. (38)	هَٰذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ جَمَعْنَاكُمْ وَالْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾
If you have a scheme left, then use it against Me now. (39)	فَإِن كَانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُونِ ﴿٣٩﴾
Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (40)	وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾
The God-fearing shall dwell amid cool shades and springs, (41)	إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي ظِلَالٍ وَعُيُونٍ ﴿٤١﴾
and fruits as they may desire. (42)	وَفَوَاكِهَ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

Eat and drink to your hearts' content in return for what you did. (43)	كُلُوا۟ وَٱشْرَبُوا۟ هَنِيٓـًٔۢا بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
Thus do We reward those who do good. (44)	إِنَّا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِى ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾
Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (45)	وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾
Eat and enjoy your life for a little while, for you are certainly guilty. (46)	كُلُوا۟ وَتَمَتَّعُوا۟ قَلِيلًا إِنَّكُم مُّجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾
Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (47)	وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾
When they are told to bow down before God, they do not bow down. (48)	وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ٱرْكَعُوا۟ لَا يَرْكَعُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾
Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth. (49)	وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾
In what message, after this, will they believe? (50)	فَبِأَىِّ حَدِيثٍۭ بَعْدَهُۥ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Enigmatic Beginning

By those sent forth in swift succession; and those tempestuously storming on; and those scattering far and wide; and those separating [right and wrong] with all clarity; and those giving a reminder, with an excuse and a warning, what you have been promised shall be fulfilled. (Verses 1–7)

The question here is that of the resurrection which the unbelievers found very hard to accept, yet the Qur'ān confirms it time after time, in many *sūrahs*, and in various ways. It was especially necessary that the Qur'ān take such care in establishing the truth of resurrection, this so that the faith can be properly established in people's minds and hearts and further that their standards and values could then be redefined. Belief in the Day of Judgement is the corner-stone of both the divine faith and human life. It is the pivot around which everything in life turns, and the criterion that judges all values and standards. Hence, establishing the truth of resurrection and subsequent reckoning and judgement needed such a sustained effort.

The *sūrah* begins with an oath by God that this promise of a life to come is certainly true. The way the oath is phrased suggests that that by which God swears belongs to the realm beyond our perception. It mentions some hidden forces that have a definite effect on the universe and on human life. Early scholars differed as to what these were: some said that they all refer to winds, and some said they refer to angels, while a third group said that some refer to winds and some to angels. It is clear, then, that these terms are ambiguous, which makes them best suited for an oath by God confirming an event which only He knows about. Just as these ambiguous things exist and have an effect on human life, this event belonging to the world beyond our perception will certainly take place.

"*By those sent forth in swift succession.*" (Verse 1) Abū Hurayrah says that this is a reference to the angels. The same is reported to have been said by Masrūq, Abū al-Ḍuḥā, Mujāhid (in one report), al-Suddī, al-Rabī' ibn Anas and Abū Ṣāliḥ. Thus the verse means an oath by the angels that are sent forth in successive waves, like running horses. Abū Ṣāliḥ says that the next four verses also refer to the angels.

Ibn Mas'ūd is reported to have said that '*those sent forth*' refers to the wind, which means that winds are sent in succession like horses running. He is reported to have said that those '*storming on*' and '*scattering far and wide*' [mentioned in the next two verses] also refer to the wind. This view is shared by Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid (in a second report), Qatādah and in another report by Abū Ṣāliḥ.

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī is uncertain whether '*those sent forth*' mentioned in the first verse refers to the angels or to the wind, but he is certain that the stormers and scatterers are the winds. He explains that the winds scatter the clouds in the sky.

Ibn Mas'ūd says that "*those separating [right and wrong] with all clarity; and those giving a reminder, with an excuse and a warning,*" refer to the angels. This is also stated by Ibn 'Abbās, Masrūq, Mujāhid, Qatādah, al-Rabī' ibn Anas, al-Suddī and al-Thawrī. It is the angels that come down carrying God's orders to His messengers, separating right from wrong, and giving revelations to those messengers that contain justification and a warning to mankind.

We note that the ambiguity is intended to give these matters by which the oath is made a particularly awesome air. This is the same as in *Sūrahs* 51 and 79. The first of these begins with the oath: "*By the winds that scatter far and wide.*" *Sūrah* 79 also starts with an ambiguous oath: "*By those that pluck out vehemently.*" This ambiguity, evident in the differences of opinion about their meaning, is intended, because their very ambiguity combines with the quick rhythm employed in the opening of the *sūrah* to produce a jolt or a shake in the listener or reader. This fits perfectly with the subject matter of the *sūrah*. In fact, every subsequent section delivers such a jolt. Thus the *sūrah* may be compared to someone in authority taking a person by the collar as he questions him about a misdeed or about his negation of something very obvious, then releasing him with a strong warning: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*"

Universal Upheaval

This enigmatic beginning is now followed by a strong jolt as we are shown images of great events that take place in the universe on the day appointed for God's messengers to present the results of their having delivered the divine message to all generations of mankind:

> *When the stars are dimmed, and the sky is rent asunder, and the mountains are scattered like dust, and the messengers are given their*

> *appointed time… For what day has all this been set? For the day of distinction. Would that you knew what the day of distinction is! Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 8–15)

On that day, the stars lose their light, and the sky is split apart, while the mountains crash and scatter like dust. Similar images of this universal upheaval are given in several *sūrahs*, all suggesting that the system of the universe we see will collapse and its collapse will be accompanied by great crashes and explosions unlike any of the smaller events – volcanoes erupting, thunderbolts, earthquakes and the like – that nonetheless leave people absolutely terrified. To compare what will happen on that day to volcanoes and earthquakes is the same as comparing bonfires organized on festive occasions to nuclear explosions. This is merely to give an idea of what will happen. In fact, it is impossible to describe the great horror that will take place when the universe explodes and scatters. That horror is beyond all human imagination.

Alongside this horror, the *sūrah* mentions another important event that is delayed until that day. It is the time appointed for God's messengers to present the outcome of their efforts in advocating the divine message throughout all generations of human life. Presenting this final account is greater than what happens to the skies, the earth and the mountains. It will entail a judgement by God of all matters relating to life on earth. This is the final word concerning all human generations across the centuries. Its description is given an air of awe that suggests that its true nature is beyond human comprehension: "*For what day has all this been set? For the day of distinction. Would that you knew what the day of distinction is!*" (Verses 12–14) It is clear that these verses are speaking about something great and serious. When this sense of seriousness, which is greater than the stars losing their light and the rending of the skies and the crashing of the mountains, is clearly felt, a frightening warning is given: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 15)

This warning by the Almighty, against the backdrop of the great universal upheaval and the majestic scene when God's messengers submit their final account on the day of distinction, is very serious indeed.

Three Quick Rounds

The first round taking us to the expected universal upheaval on the Day of Judgement is followed by one going back to the fates suffered by earlier communities that rejected the divine faith. Later communities could follow on their heels:

> *Did We not destroy those people of old? We shall certainly cause later ones to follow them. Thus do We deal with the guilty. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 16–18)

One strike to reveal the fates of past communities, numerous as they were and another to reveal what could happen to later ones, numerous as they may be. The scene of destruction stretches as far as anyone can see. Now the warning comes clear, stating the law God set in operation: "*Thus do We deal with the guilty.*" (Verse 18) It is His law that never fails. As those who are guilty expect a fate like earlier communities, the warning of impending doom is repeated: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 19)

The next round turns to the living and how they are brought into life, in accordance with elaborate planning:

> *Have We not created you from a humble fluid, placing it in a safe lodging for a pre-determined term? Thus have We determined; excellent indeed is how We determine. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 20–24)

The long and remarkable journey of an embryo, from the moment of conception, is included here, in a few fine touches, starting with a humble fluid being placed after conception in the uterus that gives it a safe lodging until an appointed time. The whole journey is planned with remarkable accuracy at every stage. A comment is added here to emphasize the infinite wisdom that assigns a fine, accurate measure to everything: "*Thus have We determined; excellent indeed is how We determine.*" (Verse 23) With this planned determination that applies

universally, the warning is repeated again: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 24)

We then have a round on earth and the life God has determined on it for mankind, giving it the facilities that make such human life easy:

> *Have We not made the earth an abode for the living and the dead? We have placed on it firm, lofty mountains and provided you with fresh water to drink. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 25–28)

These verses alert us to what we see on earth, which is made an abode embracing its children in life and death. Lofty mountains are placed on it, making it firm, and over their tops the clouds gather and then clear water runs down via them to the ground. Could all this have come about by anything other than elaborate and wise planning? How can those unbelievers continue to deny the truth they see with their own eyes: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 28)

The Release

Having filled our senses with such effects as these images and rounds produce, the *sūrah* suddenly moves to the Day of Judgement when accounts are checked and requital determined. The dreaded command is given to the guilty to go on their way to suffer the punishment they were wont to deny. The command is coupled with a strong and painful rebuke:

> *Go to that which you used to deny! Go to a shadow rising in three columns; giving no shade, nor relief from the flame. It throws up sparks as huge as forts, as bright as yellow camels. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 29–34)

Now that you have been long restrained on this day of distinction, you may go. But where can they go? To remain constrained is much better than this release, because they are told: "*Go to that which you used*

to deny." (Verse 29) It is present here before their very eyes. "*Go to a shadow rising in three columns.*" (Verse 30) The smoke of hell rises in three columns giving a shadow to which they are told to go. Yet the scorch of the flame is better than this shadow, because it is "*giving no shade, nor relief from the flame.*" (Verse 31) It is suffocating and burning. To call it a shadow or shade, the Arabic word *ẓill* carrying both meanings, is merely sarcastic.

They are told to go, and they know where they will have to go. Therefore, their destination is not mentioned by name: "*It throws up sparks as huge as forts, as bright as yellow camels.*" (Verses 32–33) Sparks are thrown in quick succession, but they are as big as large stone buildings, looking like yellow camels grazing. Such are the sparks thrown up by this fire. What is that fire like? At the moment we are absorbed in thought about this, the stern warning is repeated: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 34)

The *sūrah* has described the physical horror, giving us an image of hell. Now it presents the psychological horror that leaves the guilty speechless:

> *On that day they will not utter a word, and they will not be allowed to offer any excuse. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 35–37)

The horror described here is that deafening silence, when everyone is utterly speechless. All look humble, without a word of excuse. The time for arguments and excuses is over. Woe is present now: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 37) Elsewhere in the Qur'ān we have scenes describing their sorrow and grief, as well as the excuses they present and the oaths they swear. That day is very long, and both situations happen then, as Ibn 'Abbās explains. Here, the image given is that of absolute silence as it fits better with the general ambience of the *sūrah*.

> *This is the day of distinction: We have gathered you with all those people of old. If you have a scheme left, then use it against Me now. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 38–40)

This is, then, the day of distinction, not one for submitting excuses and justifications. You are gathered here together with all communities that lived before you so that if you can work out a plan or you are able to contrive something, you can go ahead and do it. None, however, can devise or contrive anything. The painful rebuke is met with deep silence. "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 40)

The Other Group

Now the *sūrah* gives us an image of the God-fearing and how they are honoured on that day:

> *The God-fearing shall dwell amid cool shades and springs, and fruits as they may desire. Eat and drink to your hearts' content in return for what you did. Thus do We reward those who do good. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 41–45)

These shades the God-fearing enjoy are real ones, unlike the shadow of three columns that gives no protection from the fire. They dwell among springs of water, not in the midst of choking smoke. They have "*fruits as they may desire.*" (Verse 42) What is more is that such material luxuries are given to them in front of all people gathered on that day. They all listen as the God-fearing are honoured: "*Eat and drink to your hearts' content in return for what you did. Thus do We reward those who do good.*" (Verses 43–44) How welcome is such friendly honour bestowed upon them by the Almighty. In contrast, the warning is repeated to the other group: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 45)

The *sūrah* has so far shown nothing of this present life. Now it gives a very quick glimpse of it. We are now back on earth, where strong reproach is levelled at those who are guilty:

> *Eat and enjoy your life for a little while, for you are certainly guilty. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 46–47)

Thus the two lives, the present one and the other to come, are shown in quick succession, in two images that appear to be before us now, even

though the gap between them stretches into the future, age upon age. The address was given first to the God-fearing in the life to come. It is then directed to the guilty here in this life. It is as if they are being told to consider the difference between the two moments. You may eat and enjoy yourselves a little here in this world, but you will then be deprived of it all in the next, where you will receive your due punishment: "*Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 47)

The *sūrah* wonders at their attitude as they are presented with divine guidance and called upon to follow it. Yet still they persistently refuse:

> *When they are told to bow down before God, they do not bow down. Woe on that day betide those who deny the truth.* (Verses 48–49)

Yet they are given every opportunity to see the guidance and consider the warning. Still, they continue with their erring ways. Hence, the question: "*In what message, after this, will they believe?*" (Verse 50) A person who listens to this discourse, which shakes firm mountains, who still does not believe will never come to believe, no matter how he is addressed. He is only fit for utter misery and a fate only the most miserable will suffer.

Thus the *sūrah* concludes. Its construction, musical beat, powerful images, sharp comments combine to make of it an attack that no heart can resist. Infinite in His glory is God who revealed this Qur'ān and gave it this powerful effect.